

259 2/27/90 Gorbachev's Problem: His Reforms A

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MOSCOW, Feb. 26—Is Mikhail Gorbachev faster on his feet than a Lithuanian Communist? Can he outrun, or even keep pace, with the social forces that he himself set loose?

After the weekend's historic multi-party elections in Lithuania, the most reformist Communist Party in the Soviet Union finds itself a loser; a minority in the republic's new parliament, after the independence movement Sajudis won a landslide victory. The Lithuanian party's efforts late last year to remake itself into a social democratic party in all but name, was, simply, too little too late.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Just two days after his party's loss, Lithuanian Communist Party leader Algirdas Brazauskas lumbered around the halls of the Kremlin, a wry smile on his face. "Look," he said, "what happened to us is the future. It's inevitable that you are going to see this in other republics as well."

When Gorbachev first announced that the country would hold elections for parliaments and local governing bodies in the republics, many people here believed that the Communist Party would be able to pull off a clean sweep. Local party cells in factories, collective farms and even military units have always had an ability to get out the vote that would make many a big-city American machine politician envious.

But in many parts of the country, progressive legisla-

tors, activists and citizen groups, both inside and outside the Communist Party, are showing an ever-increasing level of organization, political sophistication and fearlessness. The old party cells are not as robotic as they once were and they are facing serious competition.

In the Moscow suburbs, for example, volunteers from various political groups are helping parliamentary candidates like Father Gleb Yakunin, a dissident Russian Orthodox priest and former political prisoner, by handing out leaflets and going door to door. Progressives in the Congress of People's Deputies, such as Yuri Afanasyev, Ilya Zaslavski and Sergei Stankevich are acting like American precinct captains, stumping for their chosen local candidates. In an election campaign marked by confusion and apathy, just a little such organization could go a long way.

Sunday's nationwide pro-democracy demonstrations were also a sign that the independent reform groups and parties have developed a sense of organization and self-assurance. Tens of thousands of people across the country ignored veiled warnings to march in the streets.

Besides, the progressives appear to have political emotion—or disgust—on their side.

"You are seeing now even in the Russian republic the start of social democratic parties, peasants' organizations, even anarchists. But there is no unity in them, not yet. The one unifying political feeling in the country is anti-communism and, especially, anti-Communist Party," Igor Gryazin, a member of the Supreme Soviet,

re Outpacing the Party's Reformists

the national legislature, said. "I think you'll see party membership start to plunge [from 20 million]. . . .

"After all, the party never had any real ideological content. Only about 10 percent of the people ever joined because of their ideals, because they wanted to build communism. The rest joined because they wanted to get into an institute or get a better job. The party is an empty church."

Democratic Platform, a pro-reform group within the party, has decided on a strategy of pushing Gorbachev toward greater reform within the party instead of splitting off and forming a new party. By campaigning for pro-reform delegates to the 28th Party Congress this spring, Democratic Platform is hoping that the session will lead to an overhaul of the party—its ideology and its status as the country's dominant owner of property, financial resources and mass media.

"At the 28th Party Congress, we are hoping for a Hungarian model," Stankevich said. "We are hoping that the party will take a social democratic path, dump the concrete of the old-guard, conservative forces and even change the name."

Stankevich and others suspect that Gorbachev is now trying to secure for himself strong presidential powers so that he can go to the party congress in a secure, flexible position. Considering the anti-Communist Party mood in the country, transforming the party and even dropping the role of party leader may help Gorbachev avoid the fate of some of the party chiefs in Eastern

Europe who have been swept aside. But first he needs to secure the political base of a stronger presidency.

The Supreme Soviet will debate a bill on presidential powers this week. One publication, a service of Radio Moscow, even indicated that the bill would call for a direct vote for president, a departure from the present system of election by the Supreme Soviet.

It is almost impossible to talk about security for political leaders, especially Communist leaders, lately. Reformers like Brazauskas in Lithuania or Hans Modrow in East Germany would have been unimaginable a year or two ago, but they already have been left behind by the voters, now considering a new world of choice. The political trick for Gorbachev, in the years ahead, will be to remake himself once more as he remakes the country.

"Modrow and Brazauskas could only solve problems of transition and modernization, but they had to give way to leaders capable of really transforming society," Stankevich said.

"Gorbachev could be the exception to that pattern. But he has to make his own internal revolution, yet again. He did it once when he left behind the past and began *perestroika* [restructuring]. Now he has to recognize that the system created in 1917 is in ruins. It cannot live, it cannot be somehow revived. Also the Communist Party, in its present form, is linked with the old regime and cannot be a ruling force in a period of transformation. The party has to accept the real possibility of being in the opposition and that it must be reorganized, or die."